

**Memorial Minute for Marylin Martin Rhie, September 23, 2020 Faculty Meeting
Written and Read by Craig Felton, Professor Emeritus, Department of Art, Smith College**

On Sunday, the 26th of January 2020, Marylin Martin Rhie, Jessie Wells Post Chair Professor Emerita of Art and Professor Emerita of East Asian Studies, an internationally respected and acclaimed scholar and teacher of the Smith College Faculty, departed from this earthly life. No matter the complexity of the subject--in her teaching as well as in the many volumes of her scholarly writings—Marylin found pathways through thousands of years of Asian art, history, religion, and spirituality, bringing a richness of understanding to her audience-- from students in the classroom to colleagues in research institutions. Her carefully chosen words, both spoken and written, held strength and authority. Ideas, and the words to give them form, were precious to her.

Marylin’s full-time appointment at Smith College began in 1984, with responsibilities for teaching courses in the art of Japan, Korea, China, Tibet, and India. The classroom seemed to be an extension of Marylin’s self, and her quiet laugh—somewhere between an alto giggle and a chuckle—instantly demonstrated the warmth of her personality, assuring students that the new terrain of Asian Art that they were entering would result in a positive and rewarding intellectual journey. Since many of her students had an advanced knowledge of Western art, Marylin organized her courses to fit seamlessly into an understanding of human creativity anywhere in the world, in painting, sculpture, and architecture, while maintaining the individual cultural and regional integrity of the vast sweep of Asian art. She was able to train students to recognize the beauty of calligraphic line and the balance of negative space—esthetic qualities that people more familiar with Western art may not intuitively look for. Her courses were structured around captivating lectures—all delivered without notes. Smith College recognized the importance of Marylin Rhie’s scholarship and teaching, and in the spring of 1986, she was granted tenure, promoted to Professor a few months later, and in 1992, was awarded the Jessie Wells Post Chair Professor of Art. Marylin Rhie formally retired from Smith College on the 30th of June 2016.

Marylin Rhie’s multi-volume, fundamental work Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia was published in Leiden by Brill Academic Publishers: In 1999, Volume I: *Later Han, Three Kingdoms and Western Chin in China and Bactria to Shan-shan in Central Asia*. (466 pages, and 800 illustrations); in

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2002, Volume II in two volumes: *The Eastern Chin and the Sixteen Kingdoms Period in China and Tumshuk, Kucha and Karashahar in Central Asia (317-439 A.D.)*. (909 pages, and 1500 illustrations);

and in 2010, Volume III: *The Western Ch'in in Kansu in the Sixteen Kingdoms Periods (317-439 A.D.) and the Inter-relationships with the Buddhist Art of Gandhara*. (544 pages, 460 pages of illustrations).

Marilyn's undergraduate education began in 1955 with two years at Middlebury College, where she focused on Western art history. In 1959, she continued her studies for a year at American University in Washington, D.C. with emphasis on Western art history and studio work in painting. Realizing her true academic interest and strength, she transferred in the fall of 1961 to the University of Chicago, a premier institution for the study of the art of Asia, where she concluded her undergraduate studies and began graduate work, majoring in Chinese Buddhist sculpture and minoring in Indian and Japanese sculpture, earning the M.A. degree in September 1964, and the Ph.D. in 1970. Her Ph.D. thesis was: *A Study of the Historical Literary Evidences and Stylistic Chronological Dating on the Buddhist Images in the Main Shrine Hall of the Fo-kuang Monastery at Wu-t'ai shan*.

Marilyn Rhie received many awards to pursue her graduate studies, beginning with a two-year grant (1965-1967) from the Ford-Foundation/Far Eastern Committee at the University of Chicago for research in Japan; a Smithsonian Institution grant (October 1967-April 1968) for study based at the American Academy of Benares, Varanasi, India, which was continued until August 1968 for research in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Europe on the art of India, Central Asia, and the Far East.

Recognition of Marilyn Rhie's long and distinguished scholarly career began in March 1977 with the publication of her 1970 dissertation in the Garland Outstanding Dissertations in the Fine Arts series. Her published research continued through the ensuing years in major journals, exhibition catalogues, collection catalogues, and chapters and essays in books. They are phenomenal in number, depth, and breadth.

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Marylin received summer research grants for further research and associated travel: in 1975 from the American Council of Learned Societies and The National Endowment for the Humanities for research on 7th and 8th century Buddhist art across Asia from Japan, Korea, and Nepal, to India, Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Soviet Central Asia, Moscow, Leningrad, Stockholm, Bergen, and London; in 1982, from Smith College for study in the USA, China, Korea, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, and Rome; in 1985, a second grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities for additional research in Korea on Early Koryo Period Buddhist Sculpture; and in 1992, a third grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities for continued research in China.

Marylin Rhie lectured widely in the USA as well as abroad; one example will suffice. Her exhibition and its catalogue (co-authored with Robert A. F. Thurman of Columbia University) entitled: *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet*, opened in 1991 at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, and then was shown in New York City at the IBM Gallery of Art and Science, and had its final venue at the Royal Academy of Art in London. Marylin lectured at each institution, and during this time, she gave additional lectures on Tibetan art at many other places.

Marylin Martin Rhie was born on the 3rd of February 1937 in Washington, D. C. and was brought up by her parents Elva (Eastman) Martin and Dean Woodmansee Martin in a house designed and built from native stone by her father in the woods of Maryland. Marylin turned childhood gifts and talents into adult accomplishments, with proficiencies in studio art, playing the piano at a highly accomplished level—Chopin and Liszt were favorites, and academic excellence. She was also a skilled and knowledgeable gardener. In addition, Marylin had a formidable facility with languages, beginning with French and German for her M.A. in art history to which she added Classical Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Tibetan.

Surely, Marylin's lifelong love of Nature was influenced by her father's position with the "Old Timber Section" of the IRS, prior to which he was a Forestry Engineer with the National Forest Foundation, surveying the White Mountains National Forest. Marylin studied formally at Maine's famed Skowhegan

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School of Painting and Sculpture during the fall term in 1957, specializing in landscape painting and still life, working in a style known as American Expressionism. During the last nearly fifty years, Marilyn and her beloved husband of sixty years Young Rhie, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at Springfield College, worked together building their own natural paradise in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, to which they were initially attracted because of a large Korean Red Pine growing at one corner of the property. Trees, flowers, and native plants were important to Marilyn and she harvested seeds from various annual flowers to plant in the following spring--truly symbolic of her academic life.

In 1993, Marilyn and Young Rhie's only child Sonya graduated *summa cum laude* from Smith College and continued to the Ph.D. program at Harvard University. Sonya traveled widely with her parents in Asia and Europe, and her decision to major in the history of art came as no surprise. With full scholarships from Harvard, Sonya completed the Ph.D. degree in 1999, and, currently, is the George P. Bickford Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Sonya has two children Vita (19) and Gregory (14).

Marilyn Rhie was a powerful force in the scholarly world, with international recognition in her chosen field of Buddhist Sculpture; she achieved this prominence through constant study, extensive travels, diligent hard work, and a deep love for her material, all in the face of profound physical challenges. For her many contributions to our profession as well as to our lives at Smith College, Marilyn will remain a cherished colleague whose erudition and graciousness will be hugely missed.